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Viewing cable 09STOCKHOLM599, WHO IS CARL BILDT?

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09STOCKHOLM599	2009-09-21 14:08	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Stockholm

Appears in these articles:

http://svtplay.se/v/2256485/dokument_inifran/de_hemliga_telegrammen

VZCZCXRO0596
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR
DE RUEHSM #0599/01 2641408
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 211408Z SEP 09
FM AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4731
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 STOCKHOLM 000599

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2034
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [IR](#) [RU](#) [SW](#)
SUBJECT: WHO IS CARL BILDT?

REF: STOCKHOLM 557

Classified By: Ambassador Matthew Barzun for reasons 1.4 (B) and (C)

¶1. (C) Summary. As Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt heads to New York and Washington, we wanted to give you some background on this independent-minded individual who nevertheless wants very much to work with the United States to solve a variety of international problems.

--A product of the Cold War, Bildt has no time for governments that limit civil liberties or fail to respect

territorial integrity; since his days as a young politician, Russia has been a favorite target of his sharp tongue--something that does not always endear him to his EU colleagues.

--Bildt prefers economic carrots to sticks. He sees civilian engagement in Afghanistan as decisive to the success of the military mission.

--He has drawn the empirical conclusion that, in many cases, economic sanctions fail to have their intended effects and tend to reinforce the rogue regimes that they were intended to weaken. He remains open to evidence to the contrary, however, and has requisitioned data on EU trade with Iran in order to evaluate the likely effects of enhanced sanctions against Iran.

--Bildt has little time for chitchat but is constantly in search of information; he has been spotted in the back row of foreign policy seminars quietly taking notes.

--This cable, which draws on personal observations of post personnel and a review of decades of public and classified documents, sketches Bildt's most salient personal and professional traits.

Getting to Know You

¶2. (C) Bildt is known to be inquisitive, probing, and a man who enjoys floating and challenging ideas. He has little time for small talk; he will test interlocutors' mettle, but will be equally willing to share his own ideas once he is sure that the exchange is welcome. Bildt has been one of Sweden's leading foreign policy thinkers for over twenty years and has a voracious appetite for information. He has mastered the details of many of the world's conflicts and knows many world leaders personally. At the same time, he has a global vision of the interconnectedness of economic and political actors that gives each conflict context. Bildt views strong transatlantic ties as crucial for tackling today's foreign policy challenges. Interlocutors should be ready to press important points early in the meeting as Bildt can easily dominate a conversation, lacing his comments with dry humor.

¶3. (SBU) Bildt has a fascination for technology, especially aviation, aerospace, and information technology. Earlier in the decade, Bildt served as an adviser to both the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) and the European Space Agency. He has a deep interest in new media and its usefulness in reaching both mass and targeted audiences, providing opportunities to build rapport. His email to President Clinton in 1994 is known anecdotally as the first direct electronic communication between heads of state. Bildt has been using electronic media to connect directly to citizens and leaders ever since, first by electronic newsletter and later via a blog. Although the blog began as a compendium of personal observations, the MFA has begun to use clips from the blog as official policy statements. Nevertheless since he became foreign minister in 2006 there have been flaps about online mis- and overstatements.

¶4. (SBU) Apart from work and technology, Bildt has few hobbies. Judging from his blog, during his scarce downtime Bildt enjoys a good meal in a picturesque setting, reading history or politics, and spending the odd evening at home with the family. A sailor in his youth, Bildt still seems to relish the sea; in early July he whisked EUR A/S Gordon off to dinner on a rubber speedboat. He does not feign enthusiasm for topics that do not interest him, such as sport.

Worldview: economics, engagement key to stability

¶5. (C) Bildt sees any international event as having a ripple effect on the rest of the world, which may explain his

eagerness to get involved in many issues. For him, steady and relatively unfettered economic growth and integration into the international economic system are the preconditions

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for political stability, civil liberties, and the rule of law. Economic integration is Bildt's foreign policy tool of choice; the European Union and its ability to affect change in candidate countries via the prospect of membership and economic growth is for him the consummate policy carrot.

¶6. (C) Bildt has a mixed view of economic sanctions. He currently backs sanctions on the rulers of Burma, but in 2003 he published an article arguing that economic sanctions increase popular support for a regime, create black markets and economic and political distortions, and punish the ordinary citizen--effects that could also accrue from enhanced sanctions on Iran. Bildt's 2003 article argued for regime change in Iraq over the continuation of sanctions. That said, military intervention is not an option he champions often; he knows intimately from his experiences in post-war Bosnia that state-building is a delicate and resource-intensive process. Bildt's Balkans experience also reinforced the importance of international engagement in both reconstructing societies and mitigating conflicts. He advocated European diplomatic and economic engagement in Iraq even before the 2007 American troop surge, and generally urges engagement with distasteful regimes over their isolation to maintain a channel for influence. But in the end, Bildt is not averse to using the military to create a credible defense, maintain security in a crisis area, or as a last resort, for regime change.

¶7. (SBU) Bildt is a product of the Cold War. He still often makes reference to the fall of the Soviet system in speeches to underscore the economic and political progress Europe has made since, and to remind listeners of the ills of oppression. Bildt was working in Prague in 1968 when Soviet tanks crushed the uprising. With its military forces close to Sweden, an apparent readiness, in his view, to violate states' territorial integrity, and an ambivalent attitude toward protecting civil liberties, Russia remains the target of Bildt's characteristically frank public criticisms.

Reputation and Standing

¶8. (C) Bildt consistently ranks high in Swedish polls on government officials. He has never been a skilled television communicator nor has his tendency to play the expert generated public affection, but Swedes respect his experience, knowledge, dedication, and refusal to be anything but his own self. The scion of a Scandinavian noble family, Bildt is seen as an elite, a liability in this egalitarian country. Reports of his extensive stock holdings reinforce this image, as do press stories pointing out that Bildt allowed four consulates and an embassy to close while pursuing an expensive, ambitious travel schedule. To date Bildt appears to have successfully parried these criticisms.

¶9. (C) Prime Minister Reinfeldt brought former Prime Minister (1991-94) Bildt into his government to give it gravitas, international connections, and experience--and to harness the energies of a former rival who could otherwise become a vocal critic. Bildt is not a sitting member of the Riksdag, however, nor is he expected to run for a seat in the 2010 election, and his lack of electoral influence likely diminishes his pull within the cabinet. He is also often physically absent from cabinet meetings due to his travel schedule. Moreover, his reputation for unilateral decisionmaking makes his standing with the Prime Minister more tenuous. Bildt tends to rely on his longtime contacts, especially Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Political Director Bjorn Lyrvall, and, to a lesser extent, State Secretary Frank Belfrage for information and advice. PM Reinfeldt--who criticized Bildt in 1994 for limiting

influence in the Moderate Party to a small group of cronies--is, according to sources in the diplomatic community, intermittently frustrated by the foreign minister's tendency to set policy alone, sometimes via his blog, without consulting or informing the Prime Minister's Office. It is therefore helpful to bear in mind that while Bildt has a long leash to make Swedish foreign policy, the views he expresses may not be known to Reinfeldt beforehand. To the extent that Bildt can use his U.S. contacts to help Reinfeldt achieve his goals--high-level U.S. meetings to facilitate a global climate agreement, for example--Bildt will have more clout within the cabinet to lobby for U.S. priorities.

¶10. (C) Within Europe Bildt is well known, as are his whispered ambitions to secure an EU or other international post. The international press reports that EU leaders are happy to have the decisive Bildt at the helm of the EU Presidency after the fractious Czechs, and he is not known to have any quarrels with individual leaders. However his plainspokenness and his strong statements on Russia are an Achilles heel; Russophilic Germans, for instance, are

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unlikely to back Bildt for the EU's new foreign minister spot, and the Russians themselves could veto a UN appointment. Bildt may be able to hope for a slot on the EU Commission--perhaps the Enlargement portfolio--that he could slide into after the EU Presidency ends, although Bildt's pro-Turkey stance alienates nearly as many EU partners as his anti-Russian views. Bildt is nevertheless probably particularly eager to show that he has kept Turkish EU accession on track by easing conflicts over Cyprus, and to demonstrate progress in Bosnia that moves Sarajevo closer to an EU application. Help from the United States on these issues may be parlayed into support from Bildt on American priorities.

Leveraging Bildt on Iran and Afghanistan

¶11. (C) Bildt makes decisions based on his analysis of information. Regardless of the warmth of one's personal relationship with the foreign minister, he is unlikely to agree to a proposal strictly as a quid pro quo unless he is convinced that the policy will have the desired effect. His curious mind is hungry for new information--he has been spotted sitting quietly in the back row of think tank seminars, taking notes. Therefore facts and arguments should be marshaled in support of U.S. priorities. However, Bildt displays a certain stubbornness when he has taken a decision on a topic. If there is no sea change in conditions he prefers not to revisit a policy once it has been set. Playing on Bildt's desire to operate in the top leagues and framing actions as necessary to uphold the credibility of the EU or Sweden as an international actor is also likely to be persuasive.

Iran

¶12. (C) In theory Bildt should have room to seriously consider lobbying for stronger EU sanctions on Iran. Sweden's trade with Iran is measurable but not crucial to any one industry, its over 70,000 Iranian-heritage residents largely oppose the current government in Tehran, and the recent Iranian detention of EU nationals for their alleged anti-regime actions has stepped up Bildt's rhetoric. Meanwhile, his Moderate Party colleagues have called publicly for an even harder stand on Iran. Bildt would probably prefer to preserve his good working relationship with Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki, arguing that an open line of communication is worth more than the symbolic value of severing it. As an alternative to economic sanctions--the impact of which are always difficult to determine--Bildt has in the past publicly advocated setting up an internationally

monitored organization to provide regimes with technology for peaceful civilian nuclear power. He may offer this plan as an alternative to sanctions, however, such a mechanism would take time to set up and is a long-term solution to stem progress on a nuclear program that may mature in the short term.

¶13. (C) Bildt may be more likely to press for stronger EU sanctions on Iran in the short term if:

-- We can provide information on particular companies linked to key industries where European goods cannot be immediately replaced by other sellers; Bildt in early September requested the EU prepare a report on European trade with Iran, to judge the impact of possible sanctions, but more information is likely welcome;

-- We can provide evidence that sanctions will hit regime leaders and not the general population;

-- The United States' offer of dialogue has expired and we can argue that Europe risks losing credibility if it allows Tehran to toy with the West;

-- We can assure Bildt that we are also pressuring other reluctant EU members so that pressing for sanctions will not harm his relations with EU counterparts.

Afghanistan

¶14. (C) Sweden's involvement in Afghanistan is already consistent with Bildt's principles, and polls show that about half of Swedes back the Swedish presence there. His ability to lobby for increased Swedish participation depends on his clout within the cabinet. Bildt told the Ambassador on August 28 (reftel) that most post-election scenarios are in his view fragile and violence could increase as parties fight over power in Kabul. Bildt sees continued international military presence there as key to preventing further resurgence of the Taliban, but has publicly noted that it is

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civilian involvement which will ultimately determine success there. Bildt is pressing the EU to retool its AfPak strategy with an eye to rationalizing European bilateral and multilateral civilian contributions there, and in early September he requested figures on EU members' involvement in Afghanistan in order to "name and shame" laggards to provide more, Swedish diplomats tell post. The September 28-29 informal defense ministers' meeting will attempt to craft a holistic civilian-military approach, which Stockholm judges will help boost public approval for future additional troop deployments. Providing Bildt with details of the new U.S. strategy will allow for greater coordination with the emerging EU program.

BARZUN